3 1761 07819142 6

THE MAN WHO SAW

AND OTHER POEMS

WILLIAM WATSON

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
University of Toronto

http://www.archive.org/details/manwhosawetc00wats

THE MAN WHO SAW

3/6 net

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE POEMS OF WILLIAM WATSON. In 2 Vols., with Portrait. Comprising nearly the entire contents of the Author's 12 previously published Volumes. 9*s.* net. LONDON: JOHN LANE.

LATER VOLUMES BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NEW POEMS. 5*s.* net. LONDON: JOHN LANE.

SABLE AND PURPLE. 2*s.* 6*d.* net. LONDON: EVELEIGH NASH.

THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN. A Dramatic Poem. 4*s.* 6*d.* net. LONDON: JOHN LANE.

THE MUSE IN EXILE. 3*s.* 6*d.* net. LONDON: HERBERT JENKINS, LTD.

RETROGRESSION. 3*s.* 6*d.* net. LONDON: JOHN LANE.

PROSE WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

EXCURSIONS IN CRITICISM. 5*s.* net. LONDON: JOHN LANE.

PENCRAFT: A Plea for the Older Ways. 3*s.* 6*d.* net. LONDON: JOHN LANE.

WITH MR MURRAY'S COMPLIMENTS

THE MAN WHO SAW

AND OTHER POEMS ARISING OUT OF THE WAR

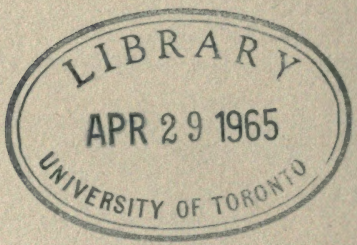
BY

WILLIAM WATSON

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1917

PR
5752
M3
1917a

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



978590

PREFACE

TWICE in his life the author of this little book has had the experience, so painful to a patriotic man, of differing from the majority of his countrymen on the moral issues involved in certain large and complex questions of international or imperial policy. In both cases he recorded his views and feelings very unambiguously in verse, incurring not a little odium and losing some friends. In both cases public opinion has since moved round into a position fundamentally much nearer his own than it had at first occupied. During the present war, with all its agonies and horrors, he has had at any rate the one private satisfaction of feeling not even the most momentary doubt or misgiving as to the perfect righteousness of his country's cause. There is nothing on earth of which he is more certain than that this Empire, throughout this supreme ordeal, has shaped her course by the light of purest duty. Her way has been the way of the just; and even if it be arguable that a base expediency would have dictated another path—even if it be held that by

acquiescing in the initial assault upon France through Belgium she could have purchased a doubtful and transient safety by a sure and lasting infamy—none but a coward and a knave would at any time have counselled so hateful a bargain.

The author owes much to Germany. Though he cannot use her tongue, he has been nourished all his life upon her unmatched achievements in an art which speaks a universal language, the art of Music. To many this art perhaps appears non-moral, yet in the works of the greatest Germanic masters of harmony—and in Beethoven most of all—there is a strangely bracing moral quality, a power which seems to arm the soul for its battle with Circumstance. It must be plain that one who has the feeling of profound obligation to Germany which is here confessed could hardly have had any malice aforethought against her when hostilities began. He was in fact one of those Englishmen who were hardest to convince of her evil intentions, till these flamed forth into acts. When she crossed the fateful bourne one of his uppermost feelings was a purely human regret that a people whose spirit had helped and fed his own should have now taken their irrevocable stand against the forces of light and growth and ascension.

The contents of this volume include little that can be described as poems of action. The author

desires his book to be considered as an intermittent commentary on the main developments, and some of the collateral phenomena, of the war. Respecting the arrangement of the poems he feels that a word of apology is due to the reader. Almost the last written is placed first; and though the contents of each separate section of the book are in the main arranged chronologically, the sections themselves pretend to no such order, but are really concurrent, not sequent. He regrets the resulting interruptions of continuity, but they were forced upon him as perhaps the lesser of two evils by the following considerations. Twenty-four of the poems are sonnets. That is to say, they are cast in a mould which, when used in the spirit and tradition of its stricter masters from Milton onwards, is not a loose aggregation of lines which chance to be fourteen in number, but one of the most rigorously exacting of poetic forms; a form usually demanding from him who employs it no little mental concentration, and enjoining upon him a certain artistic asceticism such as forbids his being seduced into mere by-play of thought or emotion. This came to be rather generally understood amongst us in the early "'eighties," when the history of various poetic vehicles or instruments was perhaps more discussed than in later years; but at the present time it is quite a common thing for a sonnet to be referred

to vaguely as its writer's "lines" on this or that, thus showing that whatever special labours may have gone to its shaping have been largely or entirely lost upon the preoccupied critic. A poet has a duty towards the offspring of his brain, even as toward the heirs of his body; and it is out of a perhaps pardonable regard for their interests and welfare, and as far as possible to secure for them their reasonable dues, that the author has thought fit to detach the sonnets in this volume from their companion poems, and give them a place apart. To dwell, though but for a moment, upon a matter so intensely literary, and at the same time so narrowly personal, may to some readers appear unseemly in a book concerned with the stupendous events now convulsing the world, and written under their shadow; but "Peace hath her victories," and even Poetry her toils, and the latter are not among the least arduous of human efforts.

It only remains for him to add that although many of these poems have already appeared—some of them under now-abandoned titles—in various newspapers, periodicals, and other publications,[1] the

[1] The *Times*, the *Daily News*, the *Morning Post*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Evening News*, the *Westminster Gazette*, the *Observer*, the *English Review*, the *Weekly Dispatch*, the *Sunday Pictorial*, the *New York Herald*, the *New York Independent*, the *Nineteenth Century*, the *Saturday Review*, and *King Albert's Book*.

editors of which are here thanked for permission to reprint them, not a few have since undergone a process for which "revision" would be a feeble word. Indeed, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that in numerous cases the version originally published was little more than the ground-plan of what is offered in the ensuing pages.

W. W.

CONTENTS

PAGE

PREFACE v

THE MAN WHO SAW 17

SONNETS:

THE FOURTH OF AUGUST, 1914. . . . 25

TO THE UNITED STATES 26

TO THE GERMAN EMPEROR 27

TERMONDE 28

BELGIUM 29

TO KING ALBERT 30

TRANQUIL LIBERTY 31

THE GIFTS OF HINDUSTAN 32

ARABIA FELIX 33

TO AMERICA, CONCERNING ENGLAND . . 34

YOU AT THE HELM 35

COMMEMORATIVE 36

TO ROOSEVELT 37

TO A WOULD-BE UMPIRE 38

SONNETS—*continued*:

PAGE

Condolence 39

Das Volk 40

The Dominant Three 41

To Sir James Crichton-Browne . . 42

To one from beyond Humber . . . 43

To a Son of Wales 44

To the Right Hon. Sir Edward Carson, on leaving Antrim, June 30, 1916. 45

The Three Alfreds 46

The Voice from the Sunset . . . 47

America once More 48

OTHER POEMS:

Crossing the Rubicon 51

Liège 54

The Harvest Moon 56

The Soul of Rouget de Lisle . . 57

The Battle of the Bight . . . 59

Veritas Victrix 61

The Charge of the 9th Lancers . . 62

Rheims 64

OTHER POEMS—*continued*:

PAGE

The Fighting Five 65

"A Place in the Sun" 67

The Fields of the Future 68

Who was the Aggressor? 69

A False Prophet 70

Desolation 71

The Half-Man 74

Kultur: a Dialogue 75

An Earnest Petition 76

Nurse Cavell 77

The Year's Retrospect 78

The Starved Lion 79

Duty 80

Ceres and Bellona 81

The Yellow Pansy 82

The Kaiser's Dirge 83

RECRUITING VERSE:

Sons of Britain 89

Kindred 91

Awake! 93

Our Men 95

THE MAN WHO SAW

THE MAN WHO SAW

THE master weavers at the enchanted loom
Of Legend, weaving long ago those tales
Through which there wanders the grey thread of truth,
Lost in the gorgeous arras of romance,
Tell how King Vortigern resolved to build
A Tower of Safety, 'mid the solitudes
That are the hem of the great druid robe
Of Snowdon, Mount of Eagles. So each day
The builders laboured, marrying stone to stone;
But ever in the night an adversary
Invisible as malevolent cancelled those
Cold nuptials, and with impish wanton rage
Shattered the walls. And thither, from beyond
That congress of grave mountains, met like seers
And bards august, though in a rivalry
Of silence rather than of song—from where
The vales are not so tranced with awe, nor yet
So far below the hilltops as to feel
Aching estrangement—fortune one day brought
A youth whose very brow was a command.

His name of Merlin had not clambered then
To fearsome greatness, like a dusky star;
Yet ev'n thus early his subduing eyes
Seemed to have known all things in life but tears;
And standing where wrecked hopes bestrewed the ground,
He said to them whose toil was shards and dust:
"Go search beneath your tower's foundations; there
Are the Unbuilders, busy while you build;
The Undoers are there." And every man obeyed.
And digging deep, they found a hollow abysm,
Where waters gnawed the ribs of the Earth, and sapped
Her sinews, till her frame tottered infirm;
Where also monsters heaved their tumid bulk
In ancient ambush, and with tremors vast
Palsied those ramparts as they yearned to rise:
Blind dragon shapes, of blindest darkness born,
That save in darkness could not live an hour,
And, touched by Light, made their dull moan, and died.

Such is the tale, which one, who chronicled
Old shadowy wars in sanctuaries of peace,
Found amid crumbled pomps, the hushed domain
Of mildew, and the empire of the moth,
Nigh on eight hundred years ago. And now,
Out of that land where Snowdon night by night

Receives the confidences of lonesome stars,
And where Carnarvon's ruthless battlements
Magnificently oppress the daunted tide,
There comes—no fabled Merlin, son of mist,
And brother to the twilight, but a man
Who in a time terrifically real
Is real as the time; formed for the time;
Not much beholden to the munificent Past,
In mind or spirit, but frankly of this hour;
No faggot of perfections, angel or saint,
Created faultless and intolerable;
No meeting-place of all the heavenlinesses;
But eminently a man to stir and spur
Men, to afflict them with benign alarm,
Harass their sluggish and uneager blood,
Till, like himself, they are hungry for the goal;
A man with something of the cragginess
Of his own mountains, something of the force
That goads to their loud leap the mountain streams.

And he too comes to bid the builders probe
Deep underneath the Tower of Safety, lest
A pit lie cavernous and covert there,
A long baulked, ravening emptiness, a grave
That famishes for its expected food.
Nay, in his hands he takes the delver's spade,
Lays bare the hollow, o'er which to build at all
Were to build woe and ruin, and 'stablishes

A mightier tower, bastioned so broad and firm,
In life, in manhood, and in womanhood,
Founded upon so massy a human rock,
And with such living bulwarks against them
Who first poured death from where the lark strews bliss,
That when, at last, ours shall be Triumph, though
Triumph perhaps too weary to rejoice,
Save with a mournful jubilation—when
Hate shall reel back from these embattled walls,
And having spent so long its hurtling bolts
With such poor thrift, shall stand before the stars
Bankrupt of thunder—then indeed shall Time
Add yet another name to those the world
Salutes with an obeisance of the soul:
The name of him, the man of Celtic blood,
Whom Powers Unknown, in a divine caprice,
Chose and did make their instrument, wherewith
To save the Saxon: the man all eye and hand,
The man who saw, and grasped, and gripped, and held.
Then shall each morrow with its yesterday
Vie, in the honour of nobly honouring him,
Who found us lulled and blindfold by the verge
Of fathomless perdition and haled us back.
And poets shall dawn in pearl and gold of speech,
Crowning his deed with not less homage, here
On English ground, than yonder whence he rose:

Yonder where crash the cataracts through the chasms,
And unto the dark tempests the dark hills
Offer their stubborn sides all gored, but keep
A heart invincible and impregnable;
While with long arm and piercing spear the sea
Thrusts far into the valleys, that of old
Heard the twin raptures of the harp and sword,
The heroic strife, and the heroic strings,
Amid the battling torrents, and beneath
The happier peaks, that without strife, prevail.

SONNETS

THE FOURTH OF AUGUST, 1914

AT last we know you, War-lord. You, that flung
The gauntlet down, fling down the mask you wore,
Publish your heart, and let its pent hate pour,
You that had God for ever on your tongue.
We are old in war, and if in guile we are young,
Young also is the spirit that evermore
Burns in our bosom ev'n as heretofore,
Nor are these thews unbraced, these nerves unstrung.
We do not with God's name make impious play;
We are not on such easy terms with Heaven;
But in Earth's hearing we can verily say,
"Our hands are pure; for peace, for peace we have striven";
And not by Earth shall he be soon forgiven
Who lit the fire accurst that flames to-day.

TO THE UNITED STATES

GREAT, O majestic Nation, great is calm!
Great, when old bounds dissolve, to tower apart,
There beyond Europe's throes, and with a heart
At peace, from northern pine to southern palm.
Great, in glad harvest-time, to send the psalm
Rolling to Heaven, nor be as they who start
At mutter of far cannon: and when the Mart
Rocks to and fro delirious, great is calm.
But when a Despot, swoln with the desire
Of boundless sway, forbears not to uncage
War's wolves on shieldless youth and guardless age,
Greater, O Nation, greater then is ire!
Doff *then* thy placid mien: unleash thy rage,
And sear and blast him with thy lips of fire.

TO THE GERMAN EMPEROR,

after the sack of Louvain

WHEREFORE are men amazed at thee, thou Blot
On the fair script of Time, thou sceptred Smear
Across the Day? Thou wert divulged full clear—
Hell's sponsor—long ago! Has earth forgot
Thy benison on a monster reeking hot
From shambles bloody as these,—thy orient peer,
Thy heart's mate, and infernal comrade dear?
His red embrace do men remember not?
Fall'n is thy fellow and withered from the scene:
Follow him thou! And when the hounds of doom
Rend thee, and for thy carrion there hath been
Fit dust-heap found, and no relenting broom,
Purged be Life's palace of thy trail unclean,
And Earth made bride-sweet with returning bloom.

TERMONDE

IN wrecked Termonde, still quaking from the bellow
Of war's mad herd—'mid ruin on ruin piled,
A stranger found a shrine, not all defiled,
Of Art's old sculptured glories without fellow;
And there—while Autumn's banners rustled yellow—
High above seas of desolation isled,
Unbruised, unmarred, with her unwounded child,
Leaned a serene Madonna of Donatello.
O'er a fledged Hermes, lord of speed and spoil,
O'er the vast throes of the Laocoön,
And Milo's lurking marble smile, she shone:
Throned above pillage, and agony's serpent coil,
And carnal charms that fever and embroil,
Motherhood, scatheless, lived divinely on.

BELGIUM

O LITTLE ship among the Dreadnoughts vast,
Where is the Dreadnought that is great as thou?
The seas break over thee from poop to prow;
Gone are thy sails and rigging, gone each mast;
Thy tackle and gear are to the midnight cast;
But though the tempest ripped and stripped thee, how
Thy crew and Captain bore them is ev'n now
As Saga and Song that light the unpassing Past.
Thou need'st not the world's tears! The coldly wise
That, safely harboured, clutch the sheltering lee,
With something of strange envy in their eyes
Gaze on the splendour of thine agony,
And hear the fleets of God saluting thee,
From anchorage old, under no neutral skies.

TO KING ALBERT

RECEIVE, from one who hath not lavished praise
On many Princes, nor was ever awed
By Empire such as grovelling slaves applaud,
Who cast their souls into its altar-blaze,—
Receive the homage that a freeman pays
To Kinghood flowering out of Manhood broad,
Kinghood that toils uncovetous of laud,
Loves whom it rules, and serves the realm it sways.
For when Your people, caught in agony's net,
Rose as one dauntless heart, their King was found
Worthy on such a throne to have been set,
Worthy by such as They to have been crowned:
And loftier praise than this did never yet
On mortal ears from lips of mortals sound.

TRANQUIL LIBERTY

("*Pax est tranquilla libertas.*"—CICERO)

PEACE is no peace when all its dream is war;
Nor are repasts beneath the hair-swung sword,
That awed in Syracuse the tyrant's board,
Such banquets as the peoples hunger for.
Not to Europa's bull need toreador
Wave scarlet provocation; and Accord
Blooms ill from arsenals for ever stored
With mouths of death for ever in act to roar.
An areopagus of nations let
Men found hereafter, puissant to restrain
Flaunted armipotence, whether on earth or sea
Or the outraged air, and suchlike peace beget
As Tully envisioned; peace itself being vain,
That is not also tranquil liberty.[1]

[1] First published, Oct. 23, 1914, in the *Westminster Gazette.*

THE GIFTS OF HINDUSTAN

THIS day do maharajah and zemindar
Show forth the Orient's most imperial mood.
Satrapies old, and kingdoms that were food
For ravening Time already in years afar,
Long ere Hydaspes' tide disdained to bar
The hosts of Alexander, bring unwooed
Their offerings, and the East forgets to brood,
And leaps to follow in tempest England's star.
For there, where first it bloomed, still wisdom flowers,
And Hindustan knows well her friends, being wise!
Hither, with smouldering empires in her eyes,
She pours unasked her tributary gold,
Pouring therewith her heart's goodwill, in showers
Richer than all Golconda an hundredfold.

ARABIA FELIX

EMIR of Heaven, Fatima's gorgeous heir,
Thou golden-scimitar'd Aldebaran,
Who, since the million-tented world began,
Hast journeyed slow through desert night, and there,
In pilgrimage unhalting, dost repair
To some celestial Mecca unknown of man—
Look down from thine eternal caravan
On earth's dim mosque, with Time's pale minarets fair,
And shower harmonious influences around
Yon myriads of Mohammed's faithful ones
O'er whom this Empire folds a fostering wing,
That, whensoe'er to their last orisons
Life's last muezzin calls them, they be found
Starry with praise from prophet and from king!

TO AMERICA, CONCERNING ENGLAND

ART thou her child, born in the proud midday
Of her large soul's abundance and excess,
Her daughter and her mightiest heritress,
Dowered with her thoughts, and lit on thy great way
By her great lamps that shine and fail not? Yea!
And at this thunderous hour of struggle and stress,
Hither across the ocean wilderness
What word comes frozen on the frozen spray?
Neutrality! The tiger from his den
Springs at thy mother's throat, and canst thou now
Watch with a stranger's gaze? So be it, then!
Thy loss is more than hers; for, bruised and torn,
She shall yet live without thine aid, and thou
Without the crown divine thou might'st have worn.

YOU AT THE HELM

YOU at the helm of Empire, that with wise
Or foolish steersmanship her course control,
Where, if she 'scape not murderous reef and shoal,
She sinks in tempest, nevermore to rise—
'Tis yours to ope or shut a nation's eyes,
'Tis yours to feed or starve a people's soul,
To give as noble dues, or meanly dole
As niggard alms, the truth for which she cries.
She bade you be custodians of the light,
Not its extinguishers; and if she fall
Into a slumber of the heart or brain,
Because you stopped her ears and veiled her sight,
Then, though you come with trumpets, you may call
A too deep sleeper, and may call in vain.

COMMEMORATIVE

NOW doth the Year, with gorgeous ritual, don
Raiment of priesthood, cope o'erlaid with gold,
But soon, from autumn's purfled scarf unstoled,
The grey cowl of November must put on;
And shaking the thinned locks that shall anon
Cumber his ways, he hears around him rolled
A nation's knell for Youth and Valour tolled,
Heroic Youth and knightly Valour, gone
Where, after clangorous day, is evenfall;
Love's *requiescat* after battle's throes;
After the cannonade and bugle call,
Earth's whispered leave, *in pace* to repose;
Lull after hurricane; and crowning all,
Glory's white lily after war's red rose.

TO ROOSEVELT

HADST thou been sitting yet in Lincoln's chair,
A different voice had pealed across the sea,
Another hand had struck a deeper key,
A larger note had pulsed upon the air.
Thou, in whose blood our Scotland hath a share—
As once on thine own soil august and free
Thyself didst not unproudly tell to me
'Mid talk of statecraft wise and songcraft fair—
Thou hadst not watched our throes with breast supine,
Nor dost thou now, nor doth thy mighty land.
Something of her vast soul we understand,
And well we know, that in this hour malign,
Not human heart she lacks, but tongue divine,
To rouse the thunders lulled in her right hand.

TO A WOULD-BE UMPIRE

GREAT Perseus babbled not of peace, while free
To rend were still the Gorgon's talons. Nor
Did wrathful Theseus, while the Minotaur
Took his red toll of white virginity,
Crave mediation. Glaucus' son, when he
Vanquished the triple-mouthed Chimæra for
The Lycians, reined not back his furious war
Till he had felled the monster's foreheads three.
Nor shall St. George of England stay his spear
In parley, while yon ravening Shape accurst
Ramps over Life and treads down arts and laws!
To you far westward we will give an ear,
Where sage and safe you sit; but hew we first
The dragon's teeth out of the dragon's jaws.

CONDOLENCE

THE language wherein Goethe did record
Wedlock of Christian Art with pagan Joy—
Of Faust with Helen, and Calvary with Troy—
That tongue I speak not; but at yon key-board,
Which is the grandchild of the harpsichord,
Rapt have I sat and listened from a boy,
While Schubert's, Schumann's gold without alloy
Flashed amid thunder, from my own hands poured.
Bach, his great coils by giant shuttles woven,
Companioned oft my youth; and oft this soul
By Wagner's Siegfried-sword was pierced and cloven:
And with the sorrowing Earth would I condole,
Hearing Man's masterpiece of dissonance roll
From the same mighty breast that nursed Beethoven.

DAS VOLK

WE did but smile, beholding the o'erfraught
Sumpter, caparisoned and proud to appear
The snorting charger of a Cavalier
Whose joy was when his casque the sunbeam caught;
And half-amused we watched the packhorse taught
To caracole and curvet in the gear
Of battle, and bear, through an august career,
The paladin of a hundred fields unfought!
But when, full war-horse now, and plunging thus
About the innocent earth of France and Flanders,
He foams his fury's virulent overplus
On the ancient plains where rippling life meanders,
Not blameless quite, this new Bucephalus!
Not all the guilt, his would-be Alexander's!

THE DOMINANT THREE

LIKE lordliest Day, that to each crannied rafter
Of Life's great hall would pierce, was Goethe's Muse.
Like emerald twilight, when no heavenly dews
Assuage its bosom, Heine shimmered after ·
Heine, who flung himself with antic laughter,
In elfin armour of chameleon hues,
Full on Philistia's never conquered thews,
The gates of Gaza, and the sons of Caphtur!
Then did unstarry night succeed to that
Rich-tinted dusk; and no large, mastering strain,
No nightingale's incomparable pain,
Goldenly stormed the silence; but there sat
Nietzsche the loveless, like a vampire bat,
Malign on the broad breast of Allemaine.

TO
SIR JAMES CRICHTON-BROWNE

AROUND your northern home, where never cease
The ebb and flow of Nith, whose waters glide
Rich with their memories of the Muse; whose tide,
In haunts of moorfowl and the wandering fleece,
Down by Caerlaverock beyond old Dumfries,
To Solway brings its dowry, like a bride;
There do the lowland mothers mourn with pride
The lowland sons, whom War hath lapped in Peace.
But you—be glad, be uplifted, seeing that what
Was great aforetime still disdains to fade;
The spirit pervervid of the heroic Scot,
Its fire unlulled, and hardly in earth allayed:
The ancient native prowess unforgot,
Valour undrooped, and manhood undecayed.

TO ONE FROM BEYOND HUMBER

ONE shire, our greatest in mere leagues of loam,
And nowise least in all that makes life's wine
A ruddy and potent draught, is yours and mine:
One norland shire, our broad ancestral home.
There, where the Swale and Ure converging roam,
My own dim roots with the far Past entwine,
And yours are 'midst the Wolds that breathe the brine,
Odorous and acrid from the eastern foam.
Strong men did Yorkshire heretofore beget,
And stainless women! And we who come of both
Have seen the valour of the dales leap high
In hearts unvanquishable, that kept their troth
With England, when Death cast for her his net
By land and sea, and from the insulted sky.

TO A SON OF WALES

[*Owen Pritchard, Esq., M.D.*]

SINCE first I saw your mountains long ago,
Dark behind Conway's or Carnarvon's hold,
I have watched the Alps put on their evening gold,
And morning kindle peaks of Afric snow;
I have crossed Niagara's flood and Delaware's flow,
And loitered 'midst Italian vinelands old,
And visited isles which the far deeps enfold,
Where Spain is ashes and a sunset-glow.
But lovely as in youth are yet to me
Mona's bleak fields and Glaslyn's torrent wave;
And dearer now than ever their wild charm,
When hardy Wales pours forth her children free,
Hungering to aid her ancient Conqueror's arm
Lest Freedom's self reel to a blood-red grave.

TO THE RIGHT HON. SIR EDWARD CARSON, ON LEAVING ANTRIM, JUNE 30, 1916

THESE cliffs, the anvils of the hammering sea,
You know them well! These winds that sweep or swerve
O'er bays that have the sickle's gleam and curve,
They are Ulster's, and you fought to keep her free.
But now a greater claims you more than she,
Claims your strong brain, clear speech, and virile nerve,
And best shall you the lesser mistress serve,
Serving the greater yet more vehemently,—
Her who demands, from souls of signal dower,
Amid the tempest that is not yet stayed,
No piecemeal service and no parcelled aid,
But their whole wealth of valour, zeal, and power,
Needing it all, and needing it each hour,
Till her vast adversary in dust be laid.

THE THREE ALFREDS[1]

THREE Alfreds let us honour. Him who drove
His foes before the tempest of his blade
At Ethandune—him first, the all-glorious Shade,
The care-crowned King whose host with Guthrum strove.
Next—though a thousand years asunder clove
These twain—a lord of realms serenely swayed;
Victoria's golden warbler, him who made
Verse such as Virgil for Augustus wove.
Last—neither King nor bard, but just a man
Who, in the very whirlwind of our woe,
From midnight till the laggard dawn began,
Cried ceaseless, "Give us shells—more shells," and so
Saved England; saved her not less truly than
Her hero of heroes saved her long ago.

[1] Friends have asked the author not to re-publish this sonnet. He does so because he believes it to be the truth.

THE VOICE FROM THE SUNSET

THERE came, from out the ocean porticoes
Of that great ice-palace, Neutrality,
This far-blown word: "No difference do I see,
In aught they fight for, betwixt these and those."
O Puissance of the West! the whole world knows
Our enemy fights to bind, we fight to free.
Our aims are bared to the sun's scrutiny,
The noonday's inquest. And if these our throes
Have no divineness, then all struggles known,
All deeds embalmed and consecrated, all
Defying of powers that manacle and enthral,
From Hellas locked with Persia to your own
First mighty strife, have been but kennel-brawl,
And hubbub of the gutter round a bone.

AMERICA ONCE MORE

THIS, this is the America that we knew!
Not she whose armour against Hell was reams
Of ratiocination; who in streams
Of most invincible ink was lost to view;
But she that once her golden clarion blew
At Gettysburg; she on whose forehead gleams
The unvanquished Morn; the America of our dreams—
Of those immortal dreams that yet are true.
O change not back to marble, mighty brow!
This human wrath is more majestic far.
Man needs thee, and our cause, being Man's, is thine.
Thy place is with the great who know not how
To falter, though their night be without star,
And their vast agony without anodyne.

OTHER POEMS

CROSSING THE RUBICON

WHO draws to-day a traitor's sword?
Behold him stand, the Man Forsworn,
Him of the shameless, faithless word,
The pledge disowned, the covenant torn,
Who prates of honour, truth and trust,
While he befouls them in the dust.

When, to yon towers of hoary fame
That Windsor lifts against the sky,
In martial cloak the Kaiser came,
We did not dream it cloaked a spy;
Yet there he sat, as now we know,
That basest thing, a guest and foe.

France was a gallant foe and fair,
That looked her enemies in the face,
With her proud eyes and freeborn air,
And valour half-concealed in grace.
Noblest of all with whom we strove,
At last she gives us noble love.

But he that took our proffered hand,
  Plotting to take our birthright too,
He, in this hospitable land,
  Bore him as only dastards do.
Here, where the Earth still nurtures men,
His hand shall soil not ours again.

Let us a League of Man proclaim,
  Against such knavery 'neath a crown
As rightly would be held to shame
  A swineherd and his fellow clown.
Shall all the loathsome creeping things
Find a last refuge among Kings?

O you that wed your sword with ours
  To break his pride who mocks at laws,
You wear, 'mid yonder perjured Powers,
  The armour of a spotless cause.
Forward, in knightliest faith arrayed,
And Truth herself shall whet your blade.

From fields of peace, from citied shores,
  Where Neva to the Baltic runs,
Where Volga to the Caspian pours,
  You have not poured in vain your sons.
From lands of Loire and Rhône and Seine
You have not poured your sons in vain.

Nor idly here, in this rough North,
Hath she whose bosom is our home
Sounded her mandate speeding forth
Our steps of thunder on the foam.
There, till the Thrones of Falsehood fall,
She guards the deeps that guard our all.

There sitting by her old sea gate,
Slow to be roused, slow to take fire,
And slow, being kindled, to abate
The blast and volley of her ire,—
With grey brows catching from afar
The red flare of the torch of war,—

Reluctant to the last, she throws
Her doubts behind, bids dreams depart,
Shakes off the rust that in repose
Had gathered round her iron heart,
In proud sad calm her anger clothes,
And leaps to embrace the fate she loathes.

LIÈGE

BETWIXT the Foe and France was she—
France the immortal, France the free.
The Foe, like one vast living sea,
Drew nigh.
He dreamed that none his tide would stay;
But when he bade her to make way,
She, through her cannon, answered, "Nay,
Not I!"

No tremor and no fear she showed:
She held the pass, she barred the road,
While Death's unsleeping feet bestrode
The ground.
So long as deeds of noblest worth
Are sung with joy, and tears, and mirth,
Her glory shall to the ends of the Earth
Resound.

Watched by a world that yearned to aid,
Lonely she stood but undismayed.
Resplendent was the part she played,
And pure.

Praised be her heroes, proud her sons!
She threw her soul into the guns.
Her name shall, with the loveliest ones,
Endure.

THE HARVEST MOON

WITH swords agleam and guns aflame—
In troop and squadron and platoon—
At harvest-home the Reapers came,
Under the waning harvest moon.

Their sickle neither paused at Dark,
Nor idled in the fervent noon:
Their sheaves lay livid, cold, and stark,
Under the dwindling harvest moon.

Benignly, without stint or dearth,
Nature had given her annual boon,
And crowned with gold the feastful Earth,
Under the golden harvest moon.

Man only—learning, all too well,
Her deadlier secrets bared too soon—
Poured, from new phials, old Death and Hell,
Under the dying harvest moon.

THE SOUL OF ROUGET DE LISLE

[*Verses founded on an early incident of the War*]

THEIR arms shall conquer—to victory led
By a voice like a trumpet's peal;
For a great Ghost marches at their head—
The Soul of Rouget de Lisle.

He gave them the Song that cannot die
Till the world's heart cease to feel;
And they go into battle captain'd by
The Soul of Rouget de Lisle.

Not for the first time—not for the last—
Does an enemy waver and reel
Before the eternal clarion blast
From the Soul of Rouget de Lisle.

For this is the Song shall break the power
That bids men grovel and kneel—
The Song that was born of a mighty hour
In the Soul of Rouget de Lisle.

And its music fires the booming gun
And edges the gleaming steel,
For the Soul of France herself is one
With the Soul of Rouget de Lisle.

THE BATTLE OF THE BIGHT

HAD I that fabled herb
Which brought to life the dead,
Whom would I dare disturb
In his eternal bed?
Great Grenville would I wake,
And with glad tidings make
The soul of mighty Drake
Upheave a glorying head.

As rose the misty sun,
Our men the North Sea scanned,
And each rejoicing gun
Welcomed a foe at hand,
Eager, with thunderous throat,
To sound, for all afloat,
The world-awakening note
The world can understand.

For ev'n as birds of night,
Hoary and tawny owl,
Do sometimes brave the light,
Like bolder, nobler fowl,

So did the foe that day
Come venturing forth for prey,
Where, on the ocean way,
  Our ocean watchdogs prowl.

But brief and plain, 'mid men
  Not born to yield or flee,
Our cannon spoke out then
  The speech that keeps us free,
And battered, with hoarse boom,
Four warships to their doom,
While one, to a fiercer tomb,
  Fled blazing down the sea.

Sleep on, O Drake, sleep well,
  In days not wholly dire!
Grenville, whom nought could quell,
  Unquenched is still thy fire.
And thou that hadst no peer,
Nelson, thou need'st not fear!
Thy sons and heirs are here,
  And shall not shame their sire.

VERITAS VICTRIX

THE Mill of Lies is loud,
Whose overseer, Germania's Over-lord,
Hath overmuch adored
The Over-sword,
And shall be overthrown, with the overproud.

Praised be the overwatching Heavens, that though
Falsehood her blare of brass may pitch yet higher,
Truth hath her trumpets also, and these of gold,
And she can blow
Longer than any liar,
Fronting the sun, high on her mountains old.

THE CHARGE OF THE 9TH LANCERS

MELINITE, lyddite, darkened heaven,
But straight at the guns the Lancers rode
By the light of the rage that in them glowed—
Straight at the guns, the deadly Eleven
That had raked and shelled them seven times seven.
With never a halt or a needless word—
With never a screen from the shattering breath
Of a myriad iron throats of death—
At the cannon in ambush our horsemen spurred,
Fiercely, grimly—their fathers' sons—
And slew the gunners beside their guns,
And captured the cannon, the roaring Eleven,
That deafened the earth and darkened the heaven.
Then their dauntless remnant came
Out of the hurricane, out of the flame,
Covered with smoke and dust and fame.

Shout, you shires, with a chorus sent
Ringing from Caithness right to Kent,
From far Northumberland down past Devon!

Shout for your heroes, Britain's sons,
Who stifled the breath of the thundering guns.
The courage that lifted their hearts shall leaven
All who go forth in England's name,
Born to o'ercome as these o'ercame,
And winnow the earth with the flail of Heaven.

RHEIMS

GREAT Lord of Rapine, on this fane you trod
With mighty foot. The mightier foot of God
Shall spurn you sprawling down His minster stair
To Infamy's crypt, and leave you gibbering there.

THE FIGHTING FIVE

WHERE the waves are as chargers that curvet and prance,
And toss their white manes in retreat or advance,
The Lennox, the Legion, the Loyal, the Lance,
Went forth with the cruiser Undaunted.

The foe, he was brave—let us give him his dues;
For Britons they are not who basely refuse
A gallant salute to an enemy's crews
That with cowardice cannot be taunted.

But they who are brave in a cause that is ill
Have Heav'n for a foe that o'ermatches them still,
And vainly they lavish their valour and skill,
And idly their prowess is vaunted.

Their squadron, it opened like hosts that deploy,
And fain had embraced us but found us too coy,
And we sank their Destroyers that could not destroy,
And we humbled the flag that they flaunted.

Then, back as from pastime, returned without boasts
Our wonderful tars to our worshipping coasts,
O'er the sea that, from age unto age, by the ghosts
Of our fathers the Sea-Kings is haunted.

"A PLACE IN THE SUN"

[*Mr. Frederic Harrison has made the suggestion that Devil's Island would be an appropriate residence for the German Emperor after the war.*]

YES, there, if he ever be captured,
Let him live, well laid by the heel,
And become, to a world enraptured,
Le diable là-bas dans l'île.

When Europe has washed off *his* mark,
Who stabbed her with poisoned steel,
Let him sigh for a Moltke and Bismarck—
Le diable, là-bas dans l'île.

Last product of German Culture,
There leave him, to make a meal
For some not too dainty vulture—
Le diable—là-bas—dans l'île.

THE FIELDS OF THE FUTURE

THOUGH gone the ancient gear of War—though men
Fight not with axe, and mace, and clanging targe—
Still does the ancient war-rage goad them, when
The bugles sound a charge.

To that primæval passion may we yet
Give ampler range, in fields of vaster marge!
'Gainst War itself, when *this* war passes, let
Our bugles sound a charge.

WHO WAS THE AGGRESSOR?

IF two men fell to fighting, of whom one
Carried, that day, no ready weapon, save
Only an oaken stave,
While the other glittered in the summer sun
With casque and corselet, lance and whetted glaive,
By which of these would all but fool or knave
Adjudge the combat to have been begun?

A FALSE PROPHET

HE grudged the gold that sparingly we spent
To keep this citadel of freedom free.
He bade us heed not arms and armament,
But go unpanoplied on land and sea.

Each week, a dismal joy to fools and blind,
His ink-streams gushed, and with dull violence flowed.
And he knew all things—Wisdom in his mind
Building notoriously her sole abode.

Ah well, his day departs! He is swept aside,
A thin and charmless voice that rails unheard.
And now let charitable oblivion hide
His name in dust, not to be disinterred.

DESOLATION

OUT of the gutters and slums of Hell—
Disgorged from the vast infernal sewer—
Vomited forth from a world where dwell
Childhood, maidenhood, wifehood pure—
She arose and towered on earth and sea,
Clothed in her green putridity.
She arose refreshed from a blissful dream
Of anguished age and ravished youth,
And innocence racked with woe extreme:
She arose to make the dream a truth.
And there where storied rivers ran,
And the roots of cities were deep in time,
And the ages pealed a mellow chime,
And the rapt and kneeling spirit of man
Had lifted far above dust and mire
Adoring turret and suppliant spire,
Her royal progress at last began.
For the daughter of offal, the sister obscene
Of whatever on earth is most unclean,
The spawning mother of nameless things,
Rode forth in a chariot drawn by Kings,

And herself by Kings was hailed a Queen.
She wafted, to east and west and south,
Miasma foul, malaria fell,
The carrion reek of her loathsome mouth,
The breath of the gutters and slums of Hell.
She beckoned the vulture poised in air;
He had long been stinted of dainties rare;
He was lean with famine and hoarse with drouth;
She promised him rich and sumptuous fare.
And around her she gathered many a Shape
That now seemed man and anon seemed ape,
And at heart was a dragon loosed from its lair.
The things of beak and talon and maw,
The creatures that know but one red law,
They lagged not afar, they were not slack
To answer her summons and follow her track;
And with hands of havoc she came to lay
Old Art and Learning in ashes gray;
She came to burn, she came to sack,
She came to devour, deflower, and slay.
She came to stretch all life on the rack,
And hath she a peer or a fellow? Nay!
The jungle's ambushed mouths of prey,
Beside *her* savagery, what are they?
Ounce and pard and panther lack
The ensanguined lust that reddens her way.
Their fury stops where the breakers play,
But hers neither land nor sea can stay,

And at deaths of lovers 'mid ocean-wrack
Her soul makes merry, her heart is gay.
O to behold her in sick dismay,
By a hurricane Nemesis buffeted back
On a ravaging plague-wind tempest-black,
And the hounds of vengeance, a raging pack,
At the heels of their quarry with jubilant bay;
Hunting her out of the light of day
And into the pit she graced full well;
Out of the world where children play,
Back to the gutters and slums of Hell!

THE HALF-MAN

SPARING not age, sparing not youth,
They tore their way with wolfish tooth
Through human homes, through human hopes:
Not men, not men, but lycanthropes!

Thus do the fabled monsters rear
Their heads anew; thus reappear
Old Shapes that freeze us and appal;
And the Half-Man is worst of all.

KULTUR: A DIALOGUE

Staff Officer.

Highness, yon babe his popgun fired.

Crown Prince.

No further pretext is required.
On, my brave Guards, and in God's name
Give old and young to sword and flame.

AN EARNEST PETITION

FREE Trade—let sager wits than mine debate
Whether it salve, whether it wound the State;
But when I see our Foe fed early and late
On each new, flattering lie,
Then, of the Powers that mercifully give
Or mercifully deny,
I ask a boon: for Free Truth then I cry!
With chartered poverty's prerogative
I haunt Heaven's ear, and clamour—while I wait
A beggar at its gate—
"Rather than be as these who darkling live,
Illumined let me die."

NURSE CAVELL

WHEN that most false evangel ever yet
Proclaimed with soulless voice from shore to shore—
The gospel of Blood and Iron—shall have met
Its doom, and be no more;

This woman's Iron courage shall resound
Above all fame the gloating sword confers;
This woman's Blood shall cry out of the ground
Against her Murderers.

THE YEAR'S RETROSPECT

WHAT was the lark to the zenith upspringing for?
What was he babbling as summer drew near?
What were the bell-ringers goldenly ringing for?
What was the heart of all maidenhood singing for?
Love, love, love, at the gush of the year.

What was the arm of the warrior smiting for?
What could it be that he held it so dear?
What were the far-parted nations uniting for?
What were the thrones and the satrapies fighting for?
Life, life, life, through the surge of the year.

What are the bride's and the mother's eyes welling for,
Now when the daylight is niggard and drear?
What is the hush in the desolate dwelling for?
What is the tolling and what is the knelling for?
Death, death, death, 'mid the lees of the year.

Love that was baulked of the heaven it was sighing for—
Life that was felled ere a leaf had turned sere—
What have they left that is worthy our dying for?
Vengeance, which earth and the deep seas are crying for,
Round the last flare of the pyre of the year.

THE STARVED LION

WHEREFORE with barking mouths abuse
The hands that dole our "doctored" news?
Is it not time there rose once more
That nobler sound—the lion's roar?

England, thou art a lion yet!
What meals are these before thee set?
Stale morsels—no fit fare for thee—
And cooked besides! Oh, canst thou be
Content to famish—late and soon
Fed like an infant with a spoon?

Lion that ne'er didst loose in vain
The tempests of thy tangled mane,—
If thou would'st shake but one lone note
Of the ancient thunder from thy throat
On these who wrong thee, where were they?
That blast would wither them away.

DUTY

GIVE gladly, you rich—'tis no more than you owe—
For the weal of your Country, your wealth's overflow!
Even I that am poor am performing my part;
I am giving my brain, I am giving my heart.

CERES AND BELLONA

THE cornfield to the battlefield
Said, "Lo, my fruits, how fair!
Pain, and pain only, thou dost yield:
Peace—only peace—I bear."

"False," said the battlefield, "thy claim!
For when War's bolts fly free,
The warrior's thew, the warrior's frame,
Whence are they but from thee?

"Thou art the thrust of steel right home,
Thou art the cannon's blast,
The fangs of hell and all their foam!
Yea, know thyself at last!"

The sickle glittered in night's noon,
A sword that hews and cleaves!
And that great shield, the golden moon,
Hung 'mid the golden sheaves.

THE YELLOW PANSY

"There's pansies—that's for thoughts."—*Shakespeare.*

WINTER had swooped, a lean and hungry hawk;
It seemed an age since summer was entombed;
Yet in our garden, on its frozen stalk,
A yellow pansy bloomed.

'Twas Nature saying by trope and metaphor:
"Behold, when empire against empire strives,
Though all else perish, ground 'neath iron war,
The golden thought survives."

THE KAISER'S DIRGE

Verses for the obsequies of the Emperor Wilhelm II

I

ONE boon—'tis the best—
O Earth, we implore!
We bring thee a guest:
Unbar thy door.

O Earth, over whom
His plough drove red,
Deny not a room,
Refuse not a bed.

Dark Mother, whose breast
With his harrow he tore—
Ev'n to *this* guest
Unbar thy door.

II

Spectres of woe,
His victims all—
Slow—slow—
Follow the pall.

Childhood, that wast
In his shambles slain,
Follow the vast
Funereal train.

Youth defiled—
  Widowhood wan–
Follow the wild
  Cortège on.

III

Thundering drums,
  Tell it afar!
In peace he comes
  Who was Lord of War.

Piercing fife
  And clamorous brass—
Call to all life
  To see him pass!

For he comes with sound
  Of pawing steeds;
With aroma crowned
  Of his odorous deeds;

Borne to his bed
  With escort due—
A million dead
  For his retinue.

IV

Carnage, whose brows
  Beetle o'er Hell,

Here is thy spouse,
  Cherish him well.

Lust-in-Hate,
  With thy fangs all foam—
O hail thy mate,
  O welcome him home.

And thou first of all spies
  This earth to o'errun,
Father of Lies,
  Receive thy son.

V

Now, to plumed hearse
  And balsam'd shroud,
Bring proud verse,
  Worthy the proud:

Garland august
  To the catafalque bring,
Rich as the dust
  Of the heart of a King.

And in high-reared pride,
  On a summit untrod—
Where is nothing beside
  But the gaze of God—

From lands hate-riven
  Let a cenotaph climb
To the hateless Heaven
  That leans o'er Time;

And grave it with none
  Of man's words but twain:
Lusitania one—
  And one, *Louvain.*

VI

Fashion his bed
  Deep, deep;
Earth o'er his head
  Heap, heap:

Load upon load
  Let him not lack,
Lest his abode
  Vomit him back.

Here are his court,
  Empire, and crown:
Rites be short,
  Lower him down.

Conquering Spade,
  Cover him o'er.
He shall invade
  Life no more.

RECRUITING VERSE

SONS OF BRITAIN

SONS of her who keeps her faith unbroken,
Her who gave you might of limb and nerve,
Her whose service—be it devoutly spoken—
Perfect freedom is, for all who serve:

Her who gave you dower of iron sinew,
Her who made you strong and fleet and brave—
Give her all the manhood that is in you:
'Tis the royal gift her own hands gave.

England's safety—England's dearer honour—
Both forbid that you should halt and wait
Till the enemy be indeed upon her,
He who vaunts and flaunts him at her gate.

Heed not overmuch when she is slandered;
Yours to guard her from a Bully's blow:
Yours to rise, and rally to her standard:
Yours to arm, and face the brutal foe.

Would you sit at home, and watch and ponder,
While the warriors agonise and dare?
Here for you is shame, but glory yonder:
Choose the glory—yea, a hero's share.

Then, though darksome be the hour, and grievous,
You shall make it great and splendid too,
And her love who bore and did conceive us
Shall for ever crown your deeds and you.

KINDRED

COME Australia, come New Zealand—
Canada, with heart of gold,
Come and help to keep this free land
Free for ever as of old.

Hangs her fortune in the balance,
Mighty is her foe and fierce.
Help to prune his Eagle's talons
Ere its beak her bosom pierce.

Yonder rants the lord of legions,
False of heart as you are true.
You as well, O younger regions,
He has lusted to subdue.

Not alone shall *we* lie cloven
If he scale our iron wall.
With our fate is Yours inwoven,
And as one we stand or fall.

Fain would he ride ruthless o'er us,
Strong in Wrong, with hoof abhorred.
Strong in Right is She that bore us—
Make her stronger with your sword.

AWAKE!

DEATH hunts for us beneath the seas,
Death hawks at us amidst the air.
Awake, O slumberers lulled in ease!
Up and prepare!

Shall England bow her head at last,
The badge of vassalage to wear?
Awake—the hour for sleep is past;
Up and prepare!

Know you what fate on Belgium fell,
You that have wives and daughters fair?
Shall they, too, feed the lusts of Hell?
Up and prepare!

What sound is this that rises o'er
The squadron's tramp, the bugle's blare?
'Tis Doom, knocking at England's door!
Up and prepare!

Arm as your sires were proud to arm,
Dare as your brothers yonder dare!
In mart and mine and forge and farm,
Up and prepare!

OUR MEN

OUR men, they are our stronghold,
Our bastioned wall unscaled,
Who, against Hate and Wrong, hold
This Realm that never quailed;
Who bear the noblest burden
Life lays on shoulders broad,
Asking not fame or guerdon,
Asking not gold or laud.

They go where England speeds them;
They laugh and jest at Fate.
They go where England needs them,
And dream not they are great.
And oft, 'mid smoke and smother
By blinding warstorm fanned,
Sons of our mighty Mother,
They fall that she may stand.

Our sailors, save when sleeping
The light sleep of the sea,
Their ancient watch are keeping,
Mother, for thine and thee!

They guard thy maiden daughters
From worse than death or pain;
The men who ward the waters,
The men who man the main.

When navies meet and wrestle,
And their vast arms strike home—
Vessel with monstrous vessel
Matched on the flame-lit foam—
What fleet returns in glory?
What fleet makes haste to fly?
O Sea, that knowest our story,
Thou, thou canst best reply!

Then hail to all who gave us
Their might of arm and soul,
Hot and athirst to save us,
To heal, and keep us whole;
Whether they serve where yonder
Far-burrowing trenches run,
Or where the ocean thunder
Peals with the thundering gun.

Printed by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ld., London and Aylesbury, England.

PR
5752
M3
1917a

Watson, (Sir) William
The man who saw, and other poems

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

UTL AT DOWNSVIEW
D RANGE BAY SHLF POS ITEM C
39 14 02 06 05 005 5